

April 26, 2006 - Slaughter Joins Fellow Democrats Linking Republican Corruption to Pain at the Pump

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Slaughter Joins Fellow Democrats Linking Republican Corruption to Pain at the Pump

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, was today joined by Representatives Henry A. Waxman and Kendrick Meek at a press conference highlighting the cost of the corruption embraced by the current Republican rubberstamp Congress and its impact on skyrocketing gas prices nationwide.

"What Americans need to understand is that each time they spend 60, 80, or even 100 dollars to fill up their car with gas, they are, in large part, paying for the systemic corruption and cronyism that have come to define this Republican Congress," Rep. Slaughter said.

The event came on the heels of Thursday's expected vote on a Republican lobby "reform" bill that Democrats and most observers believe to do little to change the way Washington Republicans conduct business.

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, can be found below:

Thank you Congressman Waxman.

What Americans need to understand is that each time they spend 60, 80, or even 100 dollars to fill up their car with gas...They are, in large part, paying for the systemic corruption and cronyism that have come to define this Republican Congress.

And for two years, Democrats have been trying to call attention to it.

We have talked about lobbyists and corporate executives being allowed to write the bills in the backrooms, while the Democrats and the American people have been left waiting outside the door.

We have talked about the massive special interest and corporate giveaways and the pay-to-play politics that have become the hallmarks of this Republican Leadership.

We have talked about secret, closed door meetings with energy executives and high ranking Administration officials.

And we have talked about the fact that the former Republican leader Tom DeLay who is now facing felony charges for Money laundering, was admonished by the Ethics committee for tying campaign donations to legislative action for Energy companies.

And just like the Ethics committee and virtually every independent ethics organization in America,

we were deeply concerned that Energy companies were hosting big ticket fundraisers for Mr. DeLay and his Republican colleagues...just days before the Energy bill was taken up by Congress.

Democrats talk over and over about how this Republican leadership won't allow open debate and consideration of ideas on the House floor.

Instead they choose to restrict debate, restrict deliberation and regularly block most amendments from even being considered by our Congress.

We often have talked about the fact that this Republican leadership doesn't allow enough time for members of Congress to even read the legislation on which we vote.

And we have talked about the enormous cost of this corruption. The price all Americans pay.

And at times, it has been a challenge to get the press and the public to pay attention.

But I think everyone starts paying attention when they are paying over \$3.00 a gallon to put gas in their car, and oil companies are reporting the highest profits in American history.

And it is important for the American people to understand, that this is not a coincidence.

In February, I released a 122 page report on this very topic.

It is called America for Sale, the Cost of Republican Corruption.

You can find it on my website: www.louise.house.gov.

In that report, we document how the Bush-Cheney Energy Bill is a direct product of our corrupted Republican Congress.

Every one of the concerns I have just expressed apply directly to how the Bush-Cheney Energy Bill was conceived, authored and rammed through this House by the Republican leadership.

It was not written to benefit the American people, it was written by energy executives and their lobbyists, for energy executives and their pocketbooks. And I don't think there is any question that they got exactly what they paid for.

In the 109th Congress, Republicans only allowed one third of all amendments submitted to the Energy Bill to be considered on the House floor, shutting out the remaining 60 Democratic and Republican amendments in the Rules Committee.

Out of the 46 Democratic and Bipartisan amendments rejected by the Republican Leadership, at least 10 would have directly dealt with skyrocketing gas and heating oil prices or helped families struggling to pay those prices.

One such amendment would have provided a tax credit to low-income families in years where the cost of gasoline has increased more than twice the rate of inflation.

Another would have implemented a windfall profit tax on gasoline, with revenue going toward a tax credit for purchases of efficient vehicles and grants for reduced mass transit fares.

Yet another Democratic amendment which I offered would have prohibited the practice of zone pricing for gasoline, insuring a free and open retail gasoline market.

Other amendments dealt with using supplies in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to address sustained price increases in gasoline or oil.

Republicans refused to allow consideration of measures which could have prevented the crisis we are facing today. Because they didn't fit with the agenda of this Republican leadership.

In the 108th Congress, the 1,100-page Energy Bill conference report was jammed through the House in less than 11 hours.

It was filed at 6 AM, the Rules Committee reported it to the floor at 9 AM, and the full House voted on it at 4:45 PM that same day.

11 hours for Congress to consider the future of our nation's energy policy.

Of course, this is violation of standing House rules.... But the Republicans simply waived the rules, as they so often do... and rejected a Democratic motion to insist that members have time to read the bill.

The end result was a bill stuffed with earmarks no one knew about, including the now-infamous "greenbonds initiative," which turned out to be a subsidy to build a Hooters restaurant in Chairman Billy Tauzin's home state of Louisiana.

It was also stuffed with subsidies and giveaways to the energy industry. Why?

Because one of the first acts the Bush Administration took in 2001 was to convene an energy task force to suggest industry-friendly changes to America's energy policy.

That task force met in secret, behind closed doors. 18 of the top 25 energy industry contributors to the 2000 Bush-Cheney campaign were at those meetings, including Ken Lay.

This group of powerful executives effectively wrote the Bush-Cheney energy plan we are suffering from today.

The same plan that has been rammed through this Congress in a corrupt and unethical manner.

Time and time again Democrats have called for reform and time and time again the Republicans have refused.

In fact, we have offered several comprehensive pieces of legislation to address the corruption that I have been talking about here today.

And this afternoon we will go into Rules to consider a Republican Reform bill that doesn't even address these problems.

The New York Times calls it the Lobbyist Empowerment Act, and USA Today refers to it as a "snow job," because it completely fails to enact any meaningful reform.

Even in the face of rampant corruption, skyrocketing gas prices and an angry public. This Republican leadership still won't reform this Congress.

The substitute amendment I offered to today's lobbying reform legislation would enact the necessary reforms to this corrupt congress.

It would end the practice of adding special interest provisions in the dead of night by mandating that conference reports must be available to be read for at least 24 hours.

And it would also require that Members must publicly disclose which earmarks they sponsored, among other things.

But I am here to tell you, that until we have fundamental change in the leadership of this Congress, I sincerely doubt any of these Democratic reforms will see the light of day in this house.

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